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available online.

## About this report

In the following pages, we present a summary of NW Straits Commission and Marine Resources Committees' (MRCs) work in 2025, encompassing both local and regional collaborative projects designed to support the health of the Northwest Straits ecosystem. The highlighted projects in these pages are those that received funding, training, or support through NW Straits Commission. Additional project materials and reports can be found on our website's [Resource Library](#).

**The work of MRCs and NW Straits Commission focuses on restoring and protecting our marine waters, species, and habitats. The unique skills across our local network allow for strong collective action. The sum of our work is greater than its individual parts.**

It's important to note that MRCs (Clallam, Jefferson, Island, Skagit, San Juan, Snohomish, Whatcom) are engaged in a variety of projects funded or supported by sources other than NW Straits Commission. For more comprehensive details, we invite you to visit the respective MRC websites. Additionally, each of the seven MRCs produces its own annual report.

# Introduction

Dear NW Straits Community,

**2025 marked 27 years of collective action stewarding marine waters** to ensure a thriving future for marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

From removing derelict boats... to monitoring bull kelp... surveying forage fish... and supporting healthy eelgrass beds, our work connected science and community to deliver tangible results.

This impact report highlights the actions and related outcomes delivered by **seven county Marine Resources Committees (MRCs)**, the **NW Straits Commission**, and **partners** who committed thousands of volunteer hours, strong local partnerships, and vital federal, state, and county support.

**Together, we achieved big milestones** – launching a new strategic plan, relaunching our SoundIQ data tool, and initiating an anchor out of eelgrass social marketing campaign with dozens of collaborators.

**THANK YOU** to our partners, volunteers, and members. This work couldn't be done without you.



Alan Clark (Commission Chair) & Lucas Hart (Commission Director)



9,886

hours of volunteer engagement

71

valued partners working  
with us side by side

55

local and regional projects led  
by MRCs and the NW Straits  
Commission

# Where we work

The NW Straits region includes Clallam, Island, Jefferson, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties and their adjoining inland marine waters.



# How we work

The seven Northwest Straits MRCs, focus on local marine issues. They recommend actions to elected officials, build public awareness, and support marine conservation. Administered by their respective counties, MRCs receive grant funding from NW Straits Commission; some receive additional support from their respective counties or partner organizations. With representation from broad interests, MRCs contribute to scientific understanding, share innovative ideas, mobilize community support, and participate in important local and regional planning processes, including Comprehensive Plans and Shoreline Master Programs.

The NW Straits Commission's role is to provide regional coordination, technical support, and to link MRCs' work with regional initiatives. The Commission is composed of one representative from each of the seven MRCs, a Tribal representative appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, and five gubernatorial appointees. Together, the Commission and MRCs combine local action with a regional perspective to advance stewardship, planning, and marine ecosystem recovery across the Northwest Straits region.



**“Whatcom MRC is an invaluable resource for our county, providing a wealth of knowledge & experience with local marine issues that helps guide our long-range planning & decision making.”**

**Kaylee Galloway,  
Whatcom County Councilmember  
& Whatcom MRC member**



# Providing insight for local planning

## The advisory role of MRCs and NW Straits Commission is a key component of instilling local input into long-term planning.

Over the last year, MRCs provided advice and insight on marine and shoreline issues to their county government on issues such as tidal energy and sea level rise. A topic area explored in 2024, shoreline armoring, continued to gain traction with MRC data informing discussions at the Puget Sound Partnership Ecosystem Coordination Board and Leadership Council—an example of how local advisory actions can have region-wide influence.

MRCs also hosted visits with elected officials, including Representative Rick Larsen, to highlight marine conservation issues of the region and important local partnerships.

The NW Straits Commission worked with the WA Department of Ecology, WA Department of Natural Resources, and additional partners to consider how rulemaking through the Shoreline Management Act (SMA) could be used to conserve critical kelp habitat throughout Washington. Suggestions offered by the NW Straits Commission included calling out

and defining kelp in the state Shoreline Management Act while also providing guidance and resources to Shoreline Master Programs. These steps will help inform local jurisdictions on kelp habitat management strategies. NW Straits Commission provides a unique opportunity to consider emerging topics like this as a regional entity.

The NW Straits Commission also coordinates a Science Advisory Committee who advises the Commission and MRCs on project development and science related topics. This year they offered technical support directly to MRCs through project-specific consultations and provided feedback and guidance on MRC project proposals for the next two-year cycle.

In support of ensuring these local-based actions can continue well into the future, **Senator Patty Murray** and **Representative Rick Larsen** reintroduced the NW Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act in 2025. The bill would reauthorize the NW Straits Commission and preserve its ability to provide ongoing support to MRCs and build regional partnerships.

“We discuss emerging issues affecting the Commission & MRCs, guiding matters presented to the full Commission for informed decisions.”

Jamie Stephens,  
Governor's appointee and  
Executive Committee chair



## Our five-year roadmap

The 2025-2030 NW Straits Commission strategic plan guides how we prioritize our work and allocate resources toward local and regional priorities. Through a six-month process, NW Straits Commissioners and staff, led by consultant Communication Resources, created a vision, mission, goals, and objectives that support our bottom-up approach to marine resources stewardship. We are incredibly grateful to our planning committee, Commissioners, and Communication Resources for the time and effort they committed to this process.



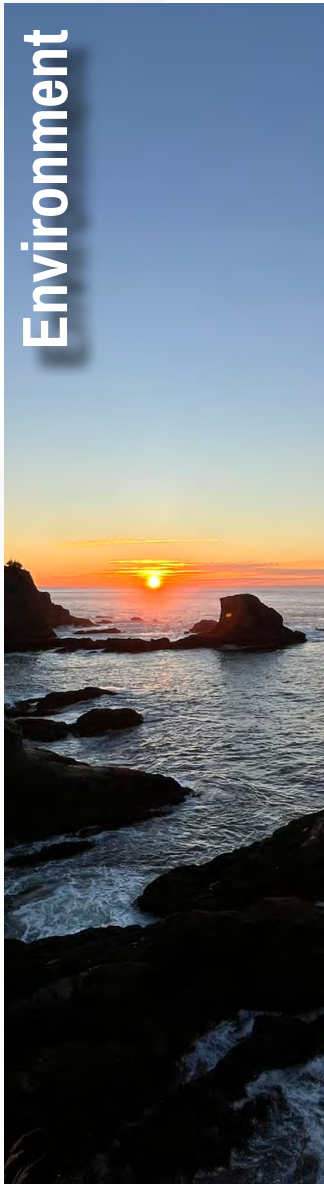
Click to view a short video overview of the strategic plan



**“As a part of the Strategic Plan committee, we reviewed the Commission & MRC roles, contributing to a thoughtful, collaborative, & actionable framework for the future.”**

**Lynne Wenberg**  
Skagit MRC chair &  
representative to the  
Commission

# We Value



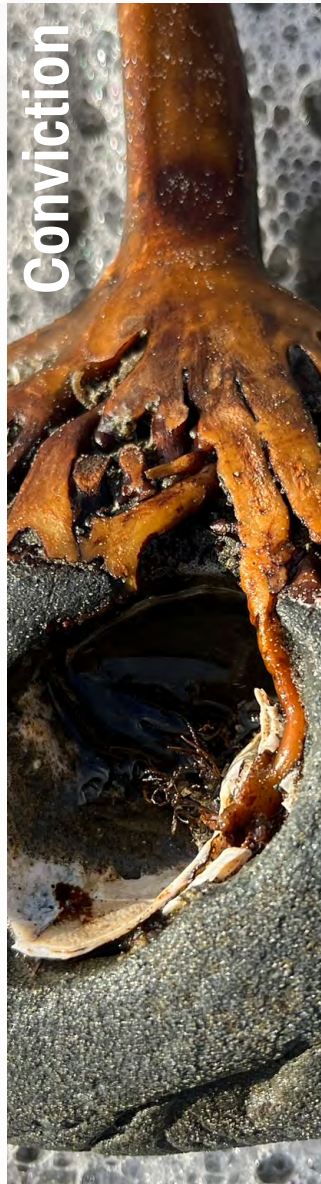
## Environment

**We value the land and ocean, the resources they provide and the communities, past and present, who continue to steward them.**



## Collaboration

**We value collaboration and consensus-based decision making.**



## Conviction

**We bring passion, optimism, and a steadfast commitment to meet the challenges of a changing marine ecosystem.**



## Community

**Our work is anchored in community-driven needs and solutions.**



## Ingenuity

**We bring curiosity, innovation, and scientific rigor to problem solving.**



## Integrity

**We strive to be accountable, trusted, transparent, and respectful.**

# Learning together, connecting communities

## Exploring how to connect our work with a broader community

NW Straits Commission staff, with participation of MRC staff, developed and led a yearlong curriculum to explore effective ways for connecting with broad communities. The curriculum covered six topics that reflect the work we do every day:

- Introduction to community building and barriers to involvement in marine conservation
- Purposeful meetings and events
- Communicating with clarity and care
- Purchasing and contracting with a focus on local and small businesses
- Hiring and recruiting practices, that support organizations and candidates
- Community connectivity tools

## Community Connectivity Analysis

Among topics explored by the NW Straits Commission in 2025 was the Community Connectivity Analysis (CCA). This tool can be used for relationship building, expanding outreach to members, connecting with other organizations, and inviting individuals and organizations to events. It provides a clear framework for effective outreach.

### Next steps:

The NW Straits Commission and MRCs will test the CCA tool for its utility in building relationships and strengthening connections across the region.

**"...It's crucial to engage with individuals beyond your immediate network."**

**- 2024 Athena Group Assessment Report**



# engage

the community to encourage  
local stewardship and sustainable  
resource use through  
**education & outreach**

# 2025 education & outreach highlights

Across seven Marine Resources Committees, thousands of residents, students, and visitors were connected to learning opportunities related to Northwest Straits stewardship.

Collectively, these projects built a powerful culture of learning where individuals and communities took meaningful, measurable steps to keep the NW Straits healthy for generations to come.



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**~4.7k**  
direct  
community  
contacts



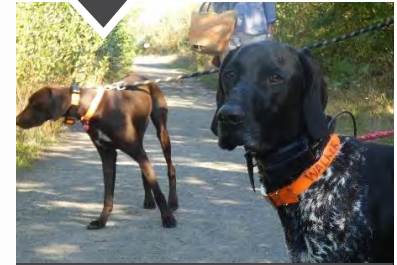
Fidalgo Bay Day,  
Skagit MRC



Outreach events,  
Jefferson MRC



**5.4k**  
dog waste  
bags distributed



Elwha Beach,  
Clallam MRC



Dive into kelp event,  
Snohomish MRC



Shoreline landowner  
workshops, Island MRC



Dock Talks,  
San Juan MRC



**496**  
students  
engaged



Ediz Hook revegetation,  
Clallam MRC



Kids on the Beach,  
Skagit MRC



Beach Seine with  
Schools, Whatcom MRC



**70** adopt a beach  
& road stewards

San Juan MRC



## engage

education  
& outreach

**In 2025, MRC education programs deepened the connection for young people and others.** Classroom partnerships reached hundreds of students, including a group that monitored forage fish throughout the school year. Larger programs like Kids on the Beach and Beach Seine with Schools brought elementary and middle school students into the field, supported by hundreds of volunteer hours. In adult learning, Salish Sea Stewards trained 24 new volunteer adult learners; each committed to at least 40 hours of service.

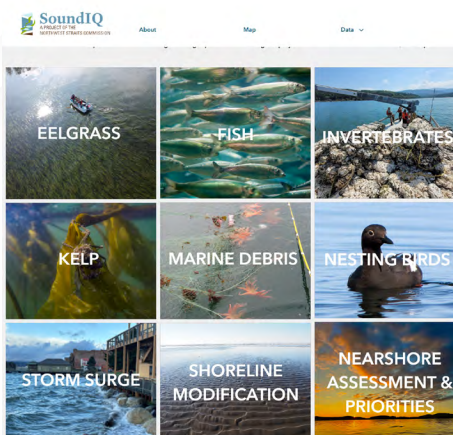
**On shorelines, cleanups made a visible difference.** San Juan MRC and partners' biannual Great Islands Cleanup, along with a new series of monthly cleanups, mobilized islanders to remove everything from microplastics to massive floats. In addition, through Adopt-a-Beach and Adopt-a-Road programs, 70 beach stewards and seven road stewards cared for nearly every adopted shoreline and roadway site in the county. Other creative outreach activities, like the Litter Critter Lab at the San Juan county fair, turned plastic pollution into hands-on learning.

**Boaters learned new ways to reduce their impacts.** Youth-led dock talks in the San Juan Islands reached 250 people and helped the community adapt to the new rule that requires boaters to remain 1,000 yards from whales. In addition, volunteers handed out whale warning flags, shared oil-spill prevention tips, and encouraged anchoring practices that safeguard eelgrass.

**Community events helped disseminate important information about our shorelines and waters.** Skagit MRC's Fidalgo Bay Day attracted nearly 400 attendees, with over 100 completing hands-on activities and 33 partner organizations sharing their work. Island MRC co-hosted two shoreline education workshops with 50 participants in attendance. Eighty-four community members learned about kelp and eelgrass through Snohomish MRC's marine vegetation "Dive In!" event, while Clallam MRC held a training on oiled wildlife response for 16 local residents—preparing them to assist in oil spill response. Jefferson MRC continued their tradition of outreach by bringing marine resource information to over 2,000 individuals through their Digging for Dinner course, Crabbing 101, Shoreline Landowner workshops and many other events. They were able to accomplish this important work through numerous partnerships (see partnerships page 28).



**engage**  
education  
& outreach



# SoundIQ

## Coastal Data for the NW Straits Region

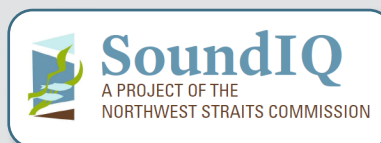
SoundIQ is a collection of geographic data and interactive maps highlighting MRC and NW Straits Commission data. The platform helps users better understand and manage coastal areas while providing clear information to government agencies, researchers, and the public as they plan, assess, and manage coastal resources and risks.

### 3,2,1...Launch SoundIQ!

In 2025, NW Straits Commission launched the updated SoundIQ, an interactive, map-based platform that makes coastal data easier than ever to explore and use. Updates included a new design that offers quick access from images on the main page to web maps and other applications.

### Inform, Engage, Steward

By centralizing high-quality data, including select external sources like WA Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) forage fish surveys, SoundIQ strengthens regional decision-making, supports research, and provides information to community-based stewards across the NW Straits.



Visit SoundIQ



“ SoundIQ turns our data into shared knowledge, showing communities the impact of our collective efforts.”

Carter Webb,  
Island MRC kelp kayak  
monitoring lead





## MRC Conference

The 2025 MRC Conference, “Shared Currents: Collaboration Across Water and Community,” brought together 100+ participants from all seven Northwest Straits counties, including MRC members and staff, Tribal leaders, local officials, project partners, Science Advisory Committee, and NW Straits Commission board, and staff.

Highlights included reflections from Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Chairman, Steve Edwards, Senator Liz Lovelett, Representative Debra Lekanoff, and Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen along with creative insights from artist and author Josie Iselin. And we were pleased to host our first digital art show “[Creative Currents](#)”.

## Communications

In 2025, the NW Straits Commission strengthened its connection with communities through our monthly e-newsletter, website, social media platforms, and news coverage. We reached thousands of individuals, reflecting strong interest and participation in our mission.

### Total Digital Engagements (2025):

- 49.8K social engagements (Facebook & Instagram)
- 5.5K LinkedIn impressions
- 15K website users
- 10.7K e-news opens
- 1.5K e-news clicks

View our past [newsletters online](#), join our mailing list and find us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Vimeo](#)) to stay up to date on regional news or to find an event near you.

## Media Reach

NW Straits Commission and MRC coverage in regional, statewide, and national outlets amplified local action, informed policy discussions, and highlighted the role of volunteers, Tribes, and partners in protecting marine ecosystems.

### Reauthorization

- From the press offices of [Sen. Murray](#) & [Rep. Larsen](#)
- [US senators reintroduce bill to fund Puget Sound's Northwest Straits restoration](#) — Seafood Source
- [New bill aims to ensure permanent funding for Northwest Straits Commission](#) — Cascadia Daily

### Science, Monitoring & Community Science

- [Why scientists search for fish eggs](#) — HeraldNet
- [Whidbey volunteers monitor bull kelp, a key 'ecosystem engineer'](#) — HeraldNet
- [Scientists begin European green crab trapping season in Drayton Harbor](#) — The Northern Light

### Community Engagement & Marine Stewardship

- [Starlight Beach Walk returns to Olympic Beach](#) — HeraldNet
- [A different kind of winter fun: tidepooling at night on Puget Sound](#) — KUOW
- [Community celebrates marine wonders at Fidalgo Bay Day](#) — GoSkagit
- [Volunteers contribute to marine stewardship](#) — Peninsula Daily News

### Habitat Restoration & Long-Term Recovery

- [A Living Shoreline, Built One Oyster at a Time](#) — KneeDeep Times
- [A decades-long quest to restore Washington's only native oyster sees success](#) — Cascadia Daily News

A photograph of two researchers, a man and a woman, wearing waders and hoods, working in a river. The man on the left is holding a metal mesh trap. The woman on the right is holding a white plastic container and looking at a small insect inside. The background shows a river with some vegetation and a small building on the shore under a blue sky.

# inform

Collecting environmental data  
to inform local government  
and resource managers

**monitoring & research**

# 2025 monitoring & research highlights

Around the region, MRC volunteers and partners carried out a remarkable breadth of monitoring projects, including bull kelp, forage fish, recreational vessel anchoring, water quality, and wildlife surveys.

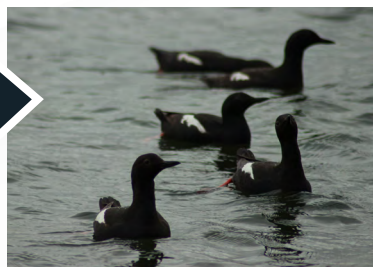
This work helps strengthen long-term datasets, enhance ecosystem stewardship, and support both marine habitats and the communities that rely on them.



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**88**

**Pigeon guillemot  
surveys  
conducted**



Clallam MRC



**4.4**

**square miles  
of benthic habitat surveyed  
in Lopez Sound,  
San Juan MRC**



San Juan MRC



**62**

**vessel count  
surveys  
conducted**



San Juan MRC



**648+**  
**acres**

**of kelp beds surveyed  
by six MRCs  
see pg 18**



**477**

**forage fish  
samples collected  
by six MRCs  
see pg 17**



**40**

**HAB events  
detected  
to protect health,  
Whatcom MRC**



**1.3k+**

**European  
green crabs  
trapped and removed  
see pg 19**





## Forage fish

**Surf smelt and sand lance may be small, but they play a big role in Puget Sound's ecosystem as a key food source for salmon and other species.**

These fish lay their eggs on the beach where volunteers conduct regular sampling to collect important baseline data on spawning trends.

Over the 2024–2025 season, volunteers from Clallam, Island, Jefferson, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties collected 477 samples at both long-standing and new monitoring sites.

Some beaches showed abundant spawning while others revealed low or no egg presence. This information helped scientists track long-term seasonal and regional trends, monitor outcomes of restoration projects, and identify where restoration or protection is needed. MRC forage fish beach sampling projects are coordinated with NW Straits Foundation, MRCs, NW Straits Commission, and WDFW, using standardized methods.

Results are included in WDFW's long-term monitoring database and the [Forage Fish Spawning Map](#), which both support regional planning, restoration, and conservation efforts. **Learn more about [forage fish spawning sampling](#).**

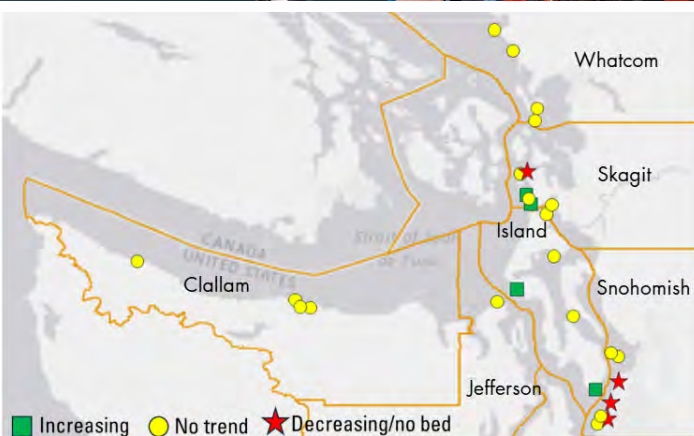
## 10-Year Milestones

At four sites we have reached 10 years of monitoring since 2016: Maple Grove (Island County), Guemes Channel (Skagit County), Similk Bay (Skagit County), Little Squalicum (Whatcom County). This long-term commitment of MRC volunteers is irreplaceable. Consistent monthly monitoring by volunteers fills an important data gap across the region that researchers and managers can use to understand seasonality, frequency, and distribution of surf smelt and sand lance spawning events.

**“ Thanks to volunteers, we have a consistent, long-term dataset that helps reveal where & when these species spawn.”**

Kirk Larsen,  
Island MRC forage fish lead





Long-term trends (through 2025) for floating kelp at MRC monitored sites



## Kelp Monitoring

Coordinated by the NW Straits Commission, the 2025 floating kelp monitoring project involved volunteers from Clallam, Jefferson, Island, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties, with support from NW Straits Foundation, WDFW, and University of Washington.

Volunteers monitored 26 floating kelp beds, documenting 648+ acres of kelp and paddling over 316+ miles. Fifty-five kayakers participated, helping track trends in bull kelp and giant kelp across the region.

Long-term data since 2015 show that most beds remain relatively stable with normal fluctuations across years. Some beds have shown significant increases, such as Biz Point and Coffin Rocks in Skagit County and Possession Point and Ebey's Landing in Island County. In contrast, only a few kelp bulbs remain at the Mukilteo and Meadowdale sites in Snohomish County and Shannon Point East in Skagit County. This work informs kelp conservation actions by informing the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan and the Washington State Floating Kelp Indicator, part of the Puget Sound Partnership's Vital Signs.

### Kelp monitoring project pages

[NW Straits Commission](#) [Island MRC](#)  
[Clallam MRC](#) [Skagit MRC](#)  
[Jefferson MRC](#) [Whatcom MRC](#)  
[Snohomish MRC](#)

### Kelp monitoring data



**“The MRC’s floating kelp surveys are among the region’s longest running & track trends in kelp bed extent. The surveys give community members hands-on opportunities to interact with our state marine forest.”**

Emily Bucker  
Jefferson MRC kelp kayaking lead

## The Puget Sound Kelp Plan

Published by NW Straits Commission in 2020, the Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan provides a framework for conserving and recovering kelp forests. Its six goals focus on reducing stressors, understanding ecosystem values, tracking distribution and trends, designating protected areas, restoring forests, and promoting awareness of and engagement in kelp conservation.

The NW Straits Commission coordinates and facilitates implementation of Kelp Plan actions with Tribes, community groups, agencies, universities, non-profits, and transboundary partners. In 2025, NW Straits Commission built upon this work by helping to launch the Washington Kelp Project Inventory, bringing attention to kelp in Washington's Shoreline Management Act, and supporting initiatives including WA Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) Kelp Forest and Eelgrass Conservation Plan and the Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead's Marine Vegetation Implementation Strategy.

Learn more: [Kelp Recovery and Conservation](#)

## WA Kelp Project Inventory

The Kelp Project Inventory allows users to report and view kelp projects in Washington to improve awareness, coordination, and tracking. The inventory has been shared with 400+ partners. It includes 89 projects and will continue to grow as users add and update entries. This work was made possible with partners at DNR, British Columbia/Washington transboundary Kelp Node working groups, the Puget Sound Partnership, and the Kelp Plan Coordination Advisory Committee, along with funding provided by the Climate Commitment Act.

[WA Kelp Project Inventory](#)



# European green crab trapping & removal

European green crab (EGC) management requires a collaborative team of partners. In 2025, NW Straits Commission, worked with 30 dedicated trappers to continue a major effort to monitor and remove invasive green crabs in Drayton Harbor (Whatcom County) and Samish Bay (Skagit County).

The program works to track the spread of EGC, monitor native species, and remove EGC to slow invasions at known hotspots, while engaging landowners and the public through education, outreach, and Molt Search trainings.

In 2025, 1,372 invasive EGC were trapped and removed in 4,852 trap sets, marking the second consecutive year of high recruitment in Drayton Harbor and Samish Bay. By removing EGC, we aim to reduce threats to shellfish and other native species while generating valuable scientific data. Data from Drayton Harbor informed two peer-reviewed publications during the last year.

Learn more: [European green crab trapping & removal](#)

## Project data in peer-reviewed publications

- [An integrated integral projection model \(IPM2\) to disentangle size-structured harvest and natural mortality](#) | *Journal of Animal Ecology*
- [Tracking two invasions for the cost of one: opportunistically tracking the range expansion of non-native \*Palaemon macrodactylus\* in the Salish Sea through participatory science](#) | *Frontiers in Marine Science*

“Working with NW Straits Commission and partners on European green crab removal, provided purpose, mentorship, & invaluable conservation experience this season.”

Daniel Duncan  
VCC intern  
European green crab



# Preserve

Building and maintaining  
robust marine resources

conservation & restoration



# 2025 conservation & restoration highlights

From removing derelict vessels and debris to restoring shellfish populations and nearshore habitats, NW Straits Commission, MRCs, and partners made progress in restoring and protecting marine ecosystems across the NW Straits region.

Volunteers, students, and community partners contributed hundreds of hours to planting, monitoring, and maintenance, reinforcing the connections between people and the waters they live near.

**~4.3k**  
Native plants  
planted



Bowman Bay,  
Skagit MRC



**52**  
eelgrass acres  
protected



No anchor zones,  
Jefferson MRC



Ediz Hook,  
Clallam MRC



Cornet Bay,  
Island MRC



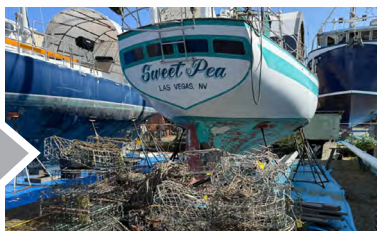
**86+**  
tons of  
vessel debris  
diverted from environment



Whatcom MRC  
& partners



**37**  
derelict crab  
pots removed



Derelict gear removal,  
Jefferson MRC



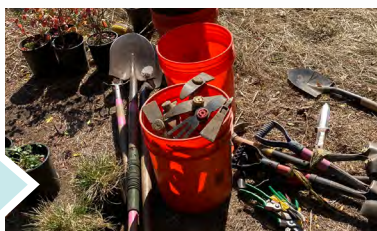
**6.6k+**  
Pinto Abalone  
outplanted



Skagit MRC  
& partners



**20**  
Rain gardens  
maintained



Rain Gardens,  
Jefferson MRC



La Conner School,  
Skagit MRC



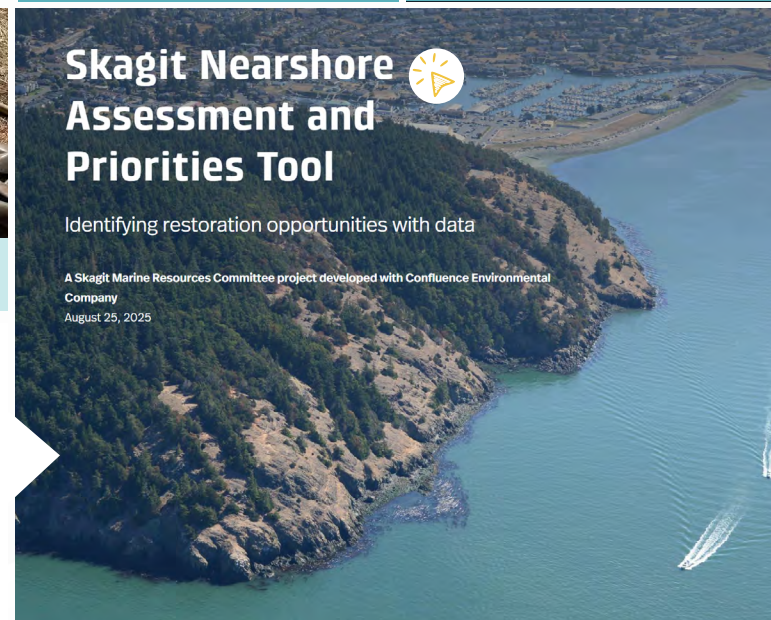
**Story  
Map  
launched**

**Skagit Nearshore  
Assessment and  
Priorities Tool**



Identifying restoration opportunities with data

A Skagit Marine Resources Committee project developed with Confluence Environmental Company  
August 25, 2025



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more information is  
available online.



## Derelict vessel prevention & removal

Derelict and abandoned vessels can create navigational hazards and impact recreational and cultural access. They can alter shoreline processes and are a source of pollutants and marine debris that harm marine resources.

### Prevention through Vessel Turn-In Events

In 2025, NW Straits Commission partnered with DNR and other partners to provide boat owners with low-cost, convenient options to recycle unwanted vessels before they become derelict. The Whatcom vessel turn-in event collected 29 boats, resulting in 86.9 tons of diverted debris. This included 69.4 tons of recycled material, including scrap wood, metal, cardboard, and plastic. In addition, 350 gallons of waste fuels and 2,200 pounds of hazardous materials such as paint, oils, coolants, adhesives, aerosols, and fire extinguishers were safely disposed of. Further, San Juan County's Derelict Vessel Prevention Program collected seven additional vessels through voluntary turn-in.

These turn-in events demonstrate a cost-effective, preventative approach that keeps debris and hazardous materials out of the water, protecting marine habitats, and the safety of our communities.

Learn more: [Derelict Vessel Removal](#)

### 2025 turn-in event partners:

Whatcom MRC, WA Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Derelict Vessel Removal Program, WA Department of Ecology, Port of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, Whatcom Working Waterfront Coalition, Landings at Colony Wharf, NOAA Marine Debris Program, NOAA, and NW Straits Commission.



### Removals

Island MRC used their project funding to prioritize two derelict vessels in their local community for removal. The local-state partnership between Island MRC and DNR made this project a success.

preserve  
conservation  
& restoration

## Eelgrass Conservation – Anchor Out for Safety & Salmon

Voluntary No-Anchor Zones (VNAZ) and a corresponding Anchor out of Eelgrass social marketing campaign work in tandem to inform boaters where to anchor to minimize eelgrass disturbance and preserve this vital marine habitat.

The Anchor Out of Eelgrass campaign and Voluntary No-Anchor Zones promote a simple, region wide action: Anchor in waters deeper than eelgrass grows.



Anchor outside of VNAZ, when applicable



Anchor in at least 25 feet (8 meters) of water at low tide (location dependent)



Or tie up at a marina or mooring buoy, when possible

### Leveraging the benefits of technology:

In 2025, NW Straits Commission piloted a virtual method of delineating eelgrass beds as an alternative to installing marker buoys. Eleven VNAZ sites were established on the Active Captain navigational platform. Our goal is to bring important information into the hands of boaters through the navigational apps they are already using. Spreading the word across the Salish Sea to Anchor Out!



**ANCHOR  
OUT OF  
EELGRASS  
FOR SAFETY &  
SALMON**



“The transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup is laying the groundwork for long-term **marine stewardship.**”

**Jacob Banting,**  
Georgia Strait Alliance & Transboundary partner



**A shared approach to cross-boarder eelgrass conservation:** NW Straits Commission coordinates a Transboundary Salish Sea Eelgrass Protection Workgroup who is instrumental in moving all of this work forward: San Juan County, Jefferson County and Whatcom County MRCs, Friends of the San Juans, SeaChange, Georgia Strait Alliance, USFWS Coastal Program, WA Sea Grant, WA State Parks, and WDNR. **Learn more:** [Anchor Out for Safety & Salmon](#)

# Olympia oyster restoration



“ The Olympia  
**oyster**  
projects  
in Sequim  
& Discovery Bays  
not only restore  
lost habitat,  
but are also a  
culturally  
important  
species for  
Coast Salish  
peoples.”

MRCs in four counties continued their work on Olympia oyster restoration, Puget Sound's only native oyster.

There were noteworthy observations among the restoration sites surveyed in 2025. In particular, Clallam MRC observed nearly 183,000 oysters at their main Sequim Bay restoration site and Jefferson MRC found more than 97,000 oysters in their Discovery Bay south parcel. These sites together show an increase of roughly 224,000 oysters since restoration work began – despite experiencing negative impacts from the 2021 heat dome. **Learn more:** [Olympia oysters](#)

Neil Harrington  
Jefferson MRC member  
& Environmental Biologist  
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe

# Tribal partnerships

As the original stewards of the region, Tribes are valued partners on many NW Straits Commission and MRC projects. Our shared environmental goals and collaborative stewardship actions have built important partnerships that support mutually beneficial outcomes.

## Honoring Tribal Treaty Rights and Partnerships

The [Murray-Metcalf Report](#) is the founding document that outlines the intention behind creating the NW Straits Commission and MRCs. The report stipulates that our work will not interfere with Tribal Treaty Rights, that work be done with Tribal authorities, that scientific recommendations be made in coordination with Tribal entities, and that MRCs and NW Straits Commission designate Tribal seats. NW Straits Commission pursues these commitments throughout its operations. Our long-standing relationships and partnerships with Tribal communities and nations in the Puget Sound region align with our goal of representing a broad range of interests and serving everyone who lives in the Northwest Straits region.

## 2025 partnerships include:

- Olympia oyster restoration in Clallam County – partnership with Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- Beach seine with schools in Whatcom County – partnership with Lummi Nation Natural Resources
- Rain garden planning in Skagit County – partnership with Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Vessel turn-in event in Whatcom County – partnership with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe
- Fidalgo Bay Day in Skagit County – partnership with Samish Indian Nation
- Derelict crab pot removal in Island and Skagit County – partnership with Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- 2025 MRC conference included a session on effective approaches to Tribal partnerships.



# Collective impact through partnership

## Partners

Bellingham Technical College Fisheries and Aquaculture Program  
City of Anacortes  
City of Bellingham  
Clallam County  
Drayton Harbor Oyster Company  
Feiro Marine Life Center  
Friends of Skagit Beaches  
Friends of the San Juans  
Georgia Strait Alliance  
Hakai Institute, UN Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre  
Island County  
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe  
Jefferson County  
KSVR Radio  
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe  
Lummi Island Heritage Trust  
Lummi Nation Natural Resources  
Makah Tribe  
Marine Agronomics LLC  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Nooksack Indian Tribe  
Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association

NW Straits Foundation  
NW Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC)  
NW Maritime Center  
Ocean Research College Academy  
Peninsula Environmental Group  
Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)  
Port of Anacortes  
Port of Bellingham  
Port of Friday Harbor  
Port of Port Townsend  
Port Townsend Marine Science Center  
Puget Sound Partnership  
Puget Sound Restoration Fund  
Quilcene School District  
Salish Sea Institute  
Samish Indian Nation  
San Juan County  
SeaChange  
Seattle Aquarium  
Skagit Conservation District  
Skagit County  
Skagit Land Trust  
Snohomish County  
Sound Toxins

Sound Water Stewards  
South Whidbey School District  
Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians  
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community  
Taylor Shellfish  
Tulalip Tribes  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
US Fish and Wildlife Service - Coastal Program  
US Geological Survey  
University of Washington (UW)  
UW, Friday Harbor Labs  
Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC)  
WA Conservation Corps (WCC)  
WA Department of Ecology  
WA Dept of Health  
WA Dept of Natural Resources (DNR)  
WA Sea Grant  
WA State Parks  
WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)  
Whatcom County  
Whatcom Working Waterfront Coalition  
WSU Extension Island County  
WSU Extension Jefferson County  
WSU Master Gardeners

## Commission Members

Alan Clark, *Chair (May-Dec)*, Clallam MRC  
Cecilia Gobin, NWIFC  
Christina Koons, San Juan MRC  
Elsa Schwartz, Governor's Appointee  
Emily Grason, Ph.D., Governor's Appointee  
Ginny Broadhurst, Governor's Appointee  
Jamie Stephens, Governor's Appointee  
Jeff Taylor, Jefferson MRC  
Ken Collins, Island MRC  
Larry Epstein & Jason Lim, Puget Sound Partnership  
Lynne Wenberg, Skagit MRC  
Rick Beauregard, Whatcom MRC  
Tim Ellis, *Chair (Jan-April)*, Snohomish MRC

## Commission Staff

Lucas Hart, Ph.D., Director  
Allie Simpson, Ecosystem Project Coordinator  
Caitlyn Blair, Program Coordinator  
Dana Oster, Marine Program Manager  
Daniel Duncan, Conservation Corps, Marine Ecosystems Specialist  
Jeff Whitty, Kelp Program Manager  
Jessica Owens, Communications Specialist  
Leah Skare, Ecosystem Projects Specialist  
Sasha Horst, Operations Manager  
Suzanne Shull, GIS Analyst Padilla Bay Reserve  
Niki Kiriara, Events Coordinator  
Commission & Coastal Training Program

## Executive Committee

Alan Clark  
Christina Koons  
Elsa Schwartz  
Emily Grason  
Jude Apple, Ph.D.  
Jamie Stephens, *Chair*  
Tim Ellis

## External Relations Committee

Alan Clark  
Cecilia Gobin  
Christina Koons  
Elsa Schwartz, *Chair*  
Jamie Stephens

## Science Advisory Committee

Anne Beaudreau, Ph.D.  
David Trimbach, Ph.D.  
Emily Grason, *Chair*, Ph.D.  
Emily Horton, Ph.D.  
Kathryn Sobocinski, Ph.D.  
Kathy Wolf, Ph.D.  
Ron Thom, Ph.D.  
Tom Mumford, Ph.D.

# How we were supported in 2025

Through investment of volunteer time along with county, state, and federal support, NW Straits Commission and MRCs carry out local and regional marine stewardship actions.

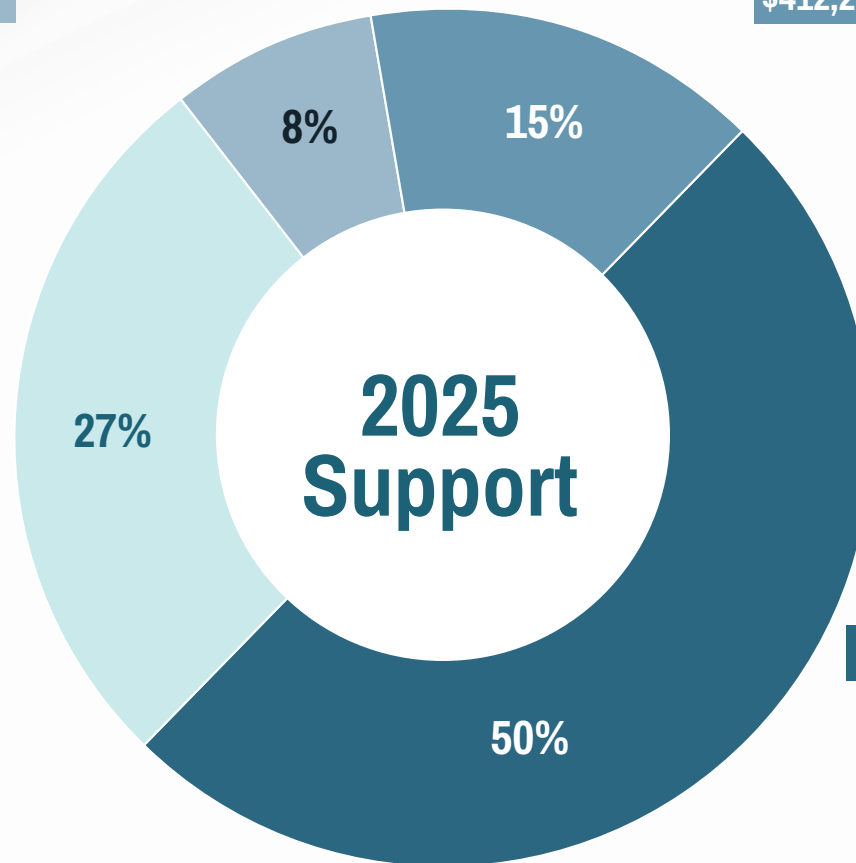
## County funding \$209,848 (8%)

MRCs are established within county government, and several counties are able to provide contributions to support the work of their local MRC. This direct support allows them to increase the impact of their work to address priority marine resource conservation issues.

## \$412,221 (15%) Equivalent volunteer time

Every year for over 26 years, volunteers dedicate thousands of hours in service of marine conservation.

Volunteers bring deep experience from a variety of professional fields, enthusiasm for on-the-ground projects, and dedication to locally based marine conservation.



## State funding \$747,044 (27%)

Washington state funding in 2025 provided direct support to MRCs for local project implementation and two regional programs — Puget Sound kelp conservation (Climate Commitment Act) and invasive European green crab management (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife).

## \$1,351,936 (50%) Federal funding

Federal funding provided by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through Puget Sound Partnership supported operations and projects of the Commission and MRCs. This funding also provided an opportunity for additional leveraging of volunteer time, state, and local resources. Additional federal funding from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provided direct project support.

# Photo credits

Cover (L-R) Row 1: Whale flag. (Sonora Tate); Olympia oysters. (WDFW); Green crab monitoring. (Allie Simpson); Volunteer monitoring oysters. (WDFW); San Juan eelgrass. (Olivia J. Graham). Whatcom MRC oyster monitoring. (Dana Daniels). Row 2: San Juan Islands vessel count. (Dr. Frances Robertson); Snohomish derelict vessel crew. (Elisa Dawson). Row 4: Commission staff. (Caitlyn Blair); Swapping winter buoys. (Jefferson MRC); Hooded nudibranchs. (Jessica Owens); Crabber outreach. (Snohomish MRC); Clallam kelp kayak monitoring. (Chelsea Korbolic); Bat star in eelgrass. (Allie Simpson). Row 5: NW Straits Commissioners. (Elsa Schwartz); Wooden Boat Festival booth. (Betsy Carlson); Kayak safety training. (Jeff Whitty); Green crab monitoring. (Leah Skare); Waves. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 1. Sunset with ferry on Turn Island. (Caitlyn Blair).

Pg. 2. Alan Clark. (Caitlyn Blair). Lucas Hart. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 4. Commission meeting at Wildcat Cove, Whatcom County. (Jessica Owens)

Pg. 5. Kirk Larsen Island MRC shows Rep Rick Larsen forage fish samples. (Lucas Hart); Rep. Debra Lekanoff speaking at the MRC conference. (Dr. Frances Robertson); Jamie Stephens and Skagit Commissioner Ron Wesen. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 6. Drone view of kayakers and bull kelp. (Tyler Cowdrey, DNR)

Pg. 7. Environment: Cape Flattery. (Jessica Owens);

Collaboration: Bat Star and eelgrass. (Allie Simpson); Conviction: Bull kelp holdfast. (Jessica Owens); Community: Anemones.

(Jessica Owens); Ingenuity: Olympia oysters. (DNR); Integrity:

Floating kelp. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 8. Beach seaweed. (Jeff Whitty).

Pg. 9. Kids on the Beach 2025. (Annie England).

Pg. 10. (L-R) Fidalgo Bay Day. (Skagit MRC); Marine Science & Stewardship (Betsy Carlson); Snohomish MRC marine vegetation event. (Snohomish MRC); Island MRC outreach. (Island MRC). Dock Talks interns. (Sonora Tate); Elwha Beach dogs. (Clallam MRC); Ediz Hook students. (Clallam MRC); San Juan MRC volunteers. (Katie Johnson); Kids on the Beach. (Annie England); Students from Carl Cozier Elementary School Beach Seine with Schools. (Kimberly Cauvel, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Public Information Officer)

Pg. 11. Kids on the Beach staff, volunteers, and Concrete students. (Annie England).

Pg. 12. Floating bull kelp. (Brooke Weigel); Bull kelp survey kayak. (Chelsea Korbolic); SoundIQ screen shots.

Pg. 13. 2025 MRC conference, Snohomish MRC staff Joycelyn Blue outside of Maple Hall, La Conner. (Jessica Owens); Skagit Commissioner Ron Wesen, NW Straits Director Lucas Hart, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Chairman Steve Edwards. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 14. European green crab trapping. (Allie Simpson).

Pg. 15. (L-R) Pigeon guillemots. (Caitlin Connelly); Benthic habitat research boat. (San Juan MRC report); San Juan vessel count WWU Marine and Coastal Sciences program. (Frances Robertson); Kayaker. (Chelsea Korbolic); Forage fish volunteers. (Kirk Larsen); Volunteers collect phytoplankton samples and environmental conditions at Semiahmoo Marina. (Dana Daniels); European green crab trapping in Fidalgo Bay. (Leah Skare);

Pg. 16. Mix of sand and forage fish eggs. (WDFW); Sand lance. (Leah Skare); Kirk Larsen and Island MRC members surveying for forage fish. (Island MRC).

Pg. 17. Whatcom MRC volunteers conduct a kelp monitoring survey at Point Whitehorn. (Dana Daniels); Kelp map. (Jeff Whitty); Clallam MRC kayak survey and Floating kelp. (Chelsea Korbolic).

Pg. 18. Bull kelp. (Brooke Weigel).

Pg. 19. Washington Conservation Corps members trapping European green crab; Leah Skare, Commission staff driving an airboat in search of green crab; VCC trapping (Leah Skare); VCC intern Daniel Duncan (Allie Simpson).

Pg. 20. Jefferson MRC's team of 17 Olympia oyster volunteers along with WDFW, WA DNR. (WDFW)

Pg. 21. (L-R) Bowman Bay vegetation volunteer. (Skagit MRC); Boots in eelgrass. (Allie Simpson); Students help revegetate Ediz Hook. (Rebecca Mahan); Island MRC Cornet Bay Weeding. (Doug McCutchin); Whatcom turn-in event. (Jessica Owens); Derelict crab pots. (Jeff Taylor); Pinto abalone. (Puget Sound Restoration Fund); Jefferson rain gardens. (Jessica Owens); Skagit NEAP. (screen shot); La Conner School Rain Gardens. (Skagit MRC); Pg. 22. Gra-Sea photos. (Jessica Owens); Whatcom turn-in event partners. (DNR); Island MRC vessel removal. (Kelly Webb).

Pg. 23. San Juan eelgrass beach. (Olivia J. Graham); Woman in a dinghy. (Jessica Owens).

Pg. 24. Closeup of Olympia oysters and Neil Harrington spreading Pacific oyster shell in Discovery Bay. (WDFW); Neil Harrington spreading oyster shell. (WDFW).

Pg. 25. Cape Flattery. (Jessica Owens).

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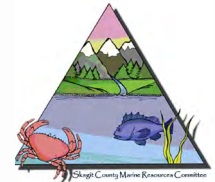
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# Thank you for your support!